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The CCC-Still Alive & Well

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Some things change little with time in the United States. One example of this is unemployment which resurfaces as a problem every so often. Unemployment was at its worst during the great depression with a 25 per cent figure for young people between the ages of 15 and 24. Unemployment in 1979 is relatively low at six per cent but continues its history as an important political issue.

The need for important conservation work has also maintained constant problem status. This is partially due to the lack of prudent forestry practices in the early years of the United States. Forest destruction has led to a tremendous backlog of reforestation and stand improvement



Forest Service Float constructed by enrollees for "Days of '76" celebrations in Deadwood, 1934.



YCC enrollees in Colorado float logs across a lake.

work while compounding the existing problem of soil erosion.

In 1933, President Franklin Roosevelt recognized the dual national needs to relieve unemployment among young people and to perform conservation work. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) was developed according to these needs.

The CCC was an organization with a quasi-military type of regimentation and some Army training. The enrollees were subjected to a tight schedule including physical training every morning. Enrollment was strictly voluntary although every volunteer was not selected for the program. The enrollees had to take an oath of obedience to their

supervisors. The Corps was attractive enough that 2.5 million Americans participated in the program to do natural resource conservation work.

The CCC was very popular—so popular that it avoided most criticism. Congressmen used the CCC as an aid to political advancement by securing one or more CCC camps to their districts. The CCC was overwhelmingly approved by the press, including bitter enemies of Roosevelt

and the New Dealism. The greatest Corps support was found in the communities where camps were established and the localities from which the enrollees came.

The presence of a nearby CCC camp stimulated local business. Supply purchases for the men and camp construction opportunities helped local economies. CCC economic benefits extended beyond the camp localities to the families of

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by David Becker

the enrollees. The money made a vital difference in many families whose money situation was tight during the depression years. One mother told Mrs. Roosevelt that "we are so dependent on the money John sends home that I don't know what we are going to do without it."⁴

Benefits other than economic benefits were highly recognized. Many people consider these to be the most important benefits. Judge Broude of Chicago estimated that the 50 per cent crime reduction in that city had been largely influenced by the CCC program because it took boys off of the streets and gave them values. The New York Commissioner of Correction issued a similar statement. The men of CCC camps improved physically as a result of good food, regular hours, and hard work. The educational program taught useful job skills. Horizons were broadened for most of them. People of different home and racial environments were blended. Most enrollees gained a real understanding of the United States and its people. The CCC rekindled hope for the future and faith in the American system.

A tremendous amount of work was accomplished by the Corps during its 1933-1942 existence. The CCC had the nickname of "Roosevelt's Tree Army" because of the terrific number of trees they planted. By June 1936, nearly 570 million young trees had been planted on National Forest lands alone. The variety of CCC went far beyond tree planting, however. They performed forest protection functions such as fighting and preventing forest fires. During the lifespan of the CCC, the acreage lost by fire in the United States reached its lowest point ever. The CCC also performed the less dramatic chores of disease and insect protection in the forests. They checked and brought a measure of control to white pine blister rust. CCC enrollees, under the watchful eyes of Forest Service technicians, engaged in a successful campaign against bark beetles by cutting down infected trees. The Corps also dealt with wildlife conservation, soil conservation, irrigation, and flood control.

The "Corn State" of Iowa was very active in the CCC program.

Iowa was allotted 16 camps of which 14 were forestry camps and two were park camps. Iowa had approximately 3,200 young men enlisted in the program and a supervisory staff of 150 men. CCC projects in Iowa included soil conservation, scenic preservation, wildlife conservation, establishment of recreation areas, forest stand improvement, and development of artificial lakes. A CCC crew dug out the diversion channel for Lake Laverne on the ISU campus. Thus Iowa, as other states, is greatly indebted to the CCC for its assistance in attaining greater beauty and prosperity during the hard times of the depression.

The Civilian Conservation Corps lost its fight for permanence and folded in 1942. One of the factors leading to this was the worsening American situation in Europe.

Why don't we have a CCC in the United States in 1979? We have the same basic problems that Roosevelt had—unemployment and a backlog of conservation work. The job outlook for youths has deteriorated in recent years. The United States Forest Service reported in 1971 that it alone had \$900,000,000 of reforestation and stand improvement work that needed to be done.

We do have a CCC in 1979 with the Youth Conservation Corps (YCC). It is now progressing with permanent status since Nixon's 1970 pilot program was successful. It is entirely more complex and under more public scrutiny than the CCC ever was and this will hopefully make it a better organization. The YCC program employs youths through the summer months only as opposed to the year round CCC operation. The Iowa YCC will employ 500 youths at 24 camps for the 1979 summer. The YCC is similar to the CCC since it was patterned from the CCC.

We, as foresters, can be very proud that the CCC tradition is being carried on by the YCC. The YCC is helping provide for the future wood and recreation requirements of America. YCC forestry makes a strong contribution towards the physical and mental development of American generations. YCC forestry projects the image of a forester as he truly is—a conservationist.



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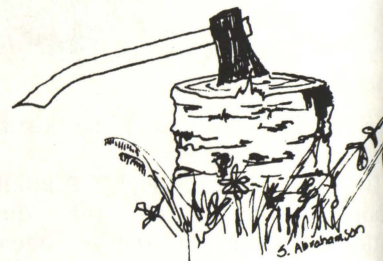
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